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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002222

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [IR](#) [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT TALABANI

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2132

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2067

[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 2065

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary Grappo for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. President Talabani cautioned the Ambassador, August 13, that recent U.S. outreach to Syria and Sunni insurgent groups is playing into perceptions that the USG supports the return of the Baathists. Talabani was likewise cautionary on overly visible U.S. advocacy for a resolution of Kirkuk in the run-up to the national elections, saying it could be used to stoke anti-U.S. sentiment. Turning to domestic politics, Talabani doubted that Da'wa had any chance of reuniting with the Shia Coalition (UIA) because of Maliki's insistence on being the UIA's PM candidate. The President also gave us his tentative itinerary for his upcoming visit to the United States (para 6). Finally, Talabani said Iranian authorities had told him they would soon release the three U.S. captives. END SUMMARY.

Iran and Syria

[1](#)2. (C) Talabani reported that Iranian officials had promised to him that Iran intended to release the three U.S. free-lance journalists currently in Iranian custody (Refs B and C). He said that Iranian officials claimed their border authorities had monitored the three Americans as they visited the Ahmed Dawa area on two consecutive days, going to the waterfalls and hiking to the summit of a nearby mountain. Iranian authorities had taken them into custody on the second day, when the three walked beyond the trail.

[1](#)3. (C) Talabani said PM Maliki was dismayed by USG efforts to reach out to Baathists even if these efforts were being pursued for the sake of national reconciliation. Press reports about USG meetings with the PCIR in Turkey were still circulating, and all Iraqis were concerned by these meetings. Maliki was also upset about the upcoming U.S.-Syria meeting. (NOTE: Maliki plans to visit Syria August 18. END NOTE.) Talabani warned that these U.S. actions were generating paranoia in Iraq and could stir up anti-U.S. sentiment that could be played up in the national elections.

Political Coalition Dating Game Heats Up

[1](#)4. (C) Earlier in the day, Talabani had delivered a keynote speech at Maliki's Da'wa political conference. Talabani opined that Da'wa had little chance of reuniting with the Shia Coalition (UIA) because Iraq's Supreme Council of Islam (ISCI) and the Sadrists refuse to have Maliki as their PM candidate. He alluded that Maliki will be forced to form other alliances. He noted there was still plenty of time ahead of the elections to form alliances.

15. (C) Talabani said that Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) PM Nechirvan Barzani had postponed his August 14 trip to Baghdad because the KRG and GOI have yet to choose members for the joint team (Ref A) that will address Kurd-Arab issues. He was confident that the trip would soon be rescheduled and took credit for brokering the August 2 Maliki-Barzani meeting at his retreat at Lake Dokhan. When pressed about a more proactive U.S. stance with the UN process to resolve disputed internal boundaries (DIBs) and in particular Kirkuk, Talabani bluntly stated that the U.S. would have to speak with KRG President Masoud Barzani directly. Talabani asserted that his view on Kirkuk is not shared by Barzani or the Kurdish people. (COMMENT: Talabani Qshared by Barzani or the Kurdish people. (COMMENT: Talabani favors "special status" for Kirkuk. END COMMENT.) He repeated that Kirkuk is a very complicated issue that must first be an "Iraqi conversation before it can be a U.S.-Iraqi conversation." Talabani noted that the Kurds had once made a deal with Saddam to grant Kirkuk special status-dual nexus, but "Saddam double-crossed us."

Tentative Travel Date for U.S. Visit

16. (C) Talabani provided the following itinerary:

Sept. 21: Leaves for New York
Sept. 23: Delivers speech at UNGA
Sept. 24: Delivers speech at the Clinton Initiative
Sept. 27: Delivers keynote speech at Socialist International

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Conference

According to his advisors, Talabani is available to meet Obama any time after September 27. Otherwise, he will undergo knee surgery and recuperate somewhere in the United States for 2-3 weeks.

17. (C) COMMENT: Talabani's outlook on solving the Kirkuk question appears decidedly less optimistic; it was the first time he has not offered to help with handling hard-liner Barzani. This may be an indicator of how weak Talabani's PUK is in relation to Barzani's KDP following the outcome of the KRG provincial elections. Having won election to the presidency on a platform demanding that Kirkuk belongs to the KRG, Barzani may find it difficult to change that position at this time. Kurdish contacts warn that visible U.S. advocacy for a resolution of Kirkuk in the run-up to the national elections could lend itself to anti-U.S. rhetoric by politicians. On the other hand, they also acknowledge that a solution to Kirkuk will almost certainly remain elusive absent U.S. activism. END COMMENT.
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